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Writing Sample

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Excerpt from Remote Control.

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Bambaa SAKHIYA
Extract from a screenplay

Remote Control

1 EXT. PROLOGUE - DREAM - MOUNTAIN MONASTERY - DAWN

The endless blue sky is like a deep, eternal ocean. Slowly- moving clouds through this enormous blue look mystical.
Right before dawn, a deep blue color starts to illuminate the edge of the horizon.

The camera moves slowly down from sky, stopping at a monastery situated in a high mountain area. The main gate of the monastery yard opens and the silhouette of a small boy appears dimly. He wears a Buddhist monk's robe and carries a bundle on his back. The young monk grips his heavy boots with both hands but he doesn't seem burdened by the bundle despite its considerable size. This young monk is TSOG - a country boy about 14 years old. TSOG looks carefully around and then closes the gate. His actions and body language show that he is doing something in secret.

Tsog runs along the monastery yard, disappearing gradually into the early-morning mist.

CUT TO:

2 EXT. DREAM - TOP OF MOUNTAIN - EARLY MORNING

Tsog stands on the edge of the mountain top, and catches his breath. The wind is whistling in the boy's ear, and a light mist is slowly vanishing, chased by the first beams of the rising sun.

At the middle of the mountain, a part of the old monastery roof is barely seen, mixed with the surrounding environment. But the shapes of the few white yurts in the wide-open valley look clear and bright. Grazing horses and sheep look tiny in the distance.

Tsog takes a deep breath and looks back.

A mid-size ovoo (a pile of rocks with protruding wooden sticks wrapped with sacred blue scarves) on the top of the mountain looks perfectly made and tidy. Tsog walks to the ovoo and puts a stone onto it carefully.

He sits next to it and stays motionless sitting on his knees. His eyes are closed and palms are together.

Suddenly, wind blows stronger and Tsog opens his eyes.

He gets up in hurry and takes his heavy boot off. Leaving his boots beside the ovoo,
the boy runs to the edge of the mountain top. Tsog jumps forward, pushing the steep cliff
with his bared feet forcefully... The boy disappears and a strange
hand-made parachute covers the entire horizon.

CUT TO:

OPENING TITLE.

FADE OUT:

3 INT. VILLAGE - TSOG'S FAMILY HOUSE - EARLY MORNING (DAY1)

Morning light passes through a small square window. It hardly illuminates a part of the low-roofed wooden house.

DOLGOR (O.S.)

(loudly)

Hey, Tsogoo!...Are you up yet?

TSOG hesitantly sits up in bed and looks around inside the tiny house.

A woman with her back to the boy is sleeping on a bed across the room. In the middle of the room, his FATHER is still dressed and snoring on the floor with his mouth half open. His unshaven, wrinkled, dark face looks woeful. There are empty beer and vodka bottles and cigarette-butts scattered on a small table. The house is in a mess.

TULGA - his young brother (aged 8-9), who is sharing the bed with him, suddenly gets a cold chill and squeezes deeper into the dirty blanket.

Tsog gets up and dresses, still half asleep. Though only 14, his long skinny face and deep dark eyes give him a serious and melancholic look. And despite the poor living conditions, he is dressed quite well, even stylishly, like any typical urban youth.

He starts organizing the empty bottles, dishes, boots and clothes that are thrown about. He props his dad's head with a pillow and covers him with a deel (Mongolian traditional clothing- like coat).

DOLGOR (O.S.)

(shouting)

Hey, Tsogoo! What are you doing? The train is leaving, come on, hurry up!

The same woman's voice yells with apparent irritation.

TSOG

Shit...Dolgor is calling me by my real name... She's really pissed off.

Tsog mutters carelessly and walks out.

CUT TO:

4 EXT. VILLAGE - NEIGHBORING YARD - EARLY MORNING (DAY1)

The small wooden house belonging to Tsog's family sits in the corner of a barren yard, bordered by broken down fences. It all looks miserable in the morning dust.

Tsog comes out and sees DOLGOR - a woman about 50, of average build, with a dark complexion, in traditional Mongolian clothing. She stands in the middle of the yard with a stern-looking face. As Tsog appears, the woman starts yelling at him again.

DOLGOR

(loudly)

If you keep this pace up, you'll be just like your father. Aren't you the one who begged me to pay you for selling my milk?

Dolgor turns abruptly and walks to the gate. Tsog follows her silently but stops suddenly and rushes back to the house. Dolgor continues her hasty walk and appears at the street without knowing about missing Tsog.

The door of Dolgor's family yard is wide open and a MAN in his mid fifties, apparently the woman's husband, is letting cows out of the yard. There are seen two ten-liter milk-canisters left near the yard gate.

DOLGOR

Watch out! Have you seen the cans with milk, or not!

She shouts again irritably toward the man and looks back over her shoulder.

DOLGOR

(shocked)

What a hell! He's gone...again...

Dolgor exclaims in low voice but next moment she starts to call Tsog loudly.

DOLGOR

Hey! Tso-oog!

Immediately, Tsog jumps out behind the door and stands in front of Dolgor. Startled by the sudden appearance of the boy Dolgor shuts down her voice. Tsog stands with a thin school notebook in one hand and a small ladle in the other. Having an innocent look at the woman he thrusts the notebook into his trousers and then rushes to the milk canisters passing silent Dolgor.

Tsog snatches the milk-cans and runs along the street. Soon after, he passes the man walking after his cows.

DOLGOR

Stay awake! And make sure you don't lose your money!

Dolgor shouts again but her voice sounds almost tenderly now.

She stays immobile looking at her man walking after caws and the boy carrying two big canisters along the street.

CUT TO:

5 INT. IN TRAIN - EARLY MORNING (DAY1)

A local passenger - train. The railway car is the cheapest one; there are no separate cabins, but only rows of seats. It is the earliest train to the city and not very crowded. Tsog is sitting next to the window leaning against the back of the seat. The two milk-cans are underneath a small table. A man is sleeping on the opposite seat and beside him sits another PASSENGER (around mid thirties), a man apparently from the countryside.

The boy indifferently watches the passing landscape with sleepy eyes through the dirty window. Through the window, a row of tall pylons lines the railway. Scattered about the wide steppe are small hills, distant yurts and a few white houses. When the first beams of morning sun hit the window, Tsog closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. STEPPE - TSOG'S IMAGINATION - EARLY MORNING (DAY1)

Beyond the train window, a young MONK with a strange parachute lands and runs over the grassland barely keeping his balance. His bare feet twinkle under the morning sun. He manages to make it a few steps and collapses on the green land but he laughs happily.

CUT TO:

7 INT. IN TRAIN - EARLY MORNING (DAY1) Tsog opens

his eyes.

Now, he sees a boy pulling a small cart with a big can of water, gradually disappearing.

Tsog sits back and looks at other passengers before taking out his old thin school notebook.

While he turns pages, sketches of a monk flying with a parachute can be seen. Opening a new page, Tsog starts to draw another rough sketch of a monk landing with a parachute. He draws fast and skillfully. Behind him, bright sun - light hits the window, flickering at the same rhythm as the moving train.

CUT TO:

8 EXT. CITY - COURTYARD - MORNING (DAY1)

Beams of the rising sun shine brightly, reflecting off the glittering walls of modern buildings.

Ulaanbaatar - the biggest city of nomads who have embarked on a newly-settled life; a city of contrast and paradox where the old Soviet-style district is surrounded by suburbs of traditional nomads' yurts. Colossal chimneys of old factories and the roofs of ancient monasteries line the horizon. Chaotic traffic and pretentious ultra-modern buildings overflow with explosive energy in a seemingly illogical passion for creation and distraction.

Life awakens in the residential district of the city. A courtyard surrounded by bleak high-rise buildings looks clean and well-designed. At the center is a big rectangular playground with a sandbox, roundabout and wooden slide.

The courtyard looks quiet and empty, except moving truck parked in front of the one of the entrances. Two young men with uniforms are carrying a big flat TV into the entrance.

An OLD WOMAN with a small can appears at the entrance and stops to look at the truck with a great interest. The truck is almost empty. A tall MAN (TUVSHIN) about 30, stands next to the truck holding a big canvas. The old woman walks toward the playground.

TEXT: ULAANBAATAR. 200... appear.

Tsog stands in the middle of the playground selling milk. Milk canisters behind him look whiter in the bright sunlight.

The old woman comes to Tsog and buys his milk.

When the old woman leaves carrying her can with milk, Tsog looks around the courtyard and starts to shout loudly.

At the entrance door, the old woman meets with the man carrying the big canvas into the entrance and stands waiting for him to pass.

TSOG
Milk!... Fresh milk for sale! Milk!

CUT TO:

9

EXT. WINDOW - VIEW OF PLAYGROUND - LATE MORNING (DAY1)

The courtyard is occupied by playing children and elderly people sitting in the sun. The boy selling milk stands at the same spot - in the middle of the playground. Apparently, his business for the day is over. As the last customer walks toward the apartment building with his milk purchase, Tsog walks in the opposite direction carrying his two empty canisters.

CUT TO:

10 EXT. COURTYARD - LATE MORNING (DAY1)

A taxi stops shortly next to the GUARD - a middleaged short man with a black oversized uniform, standing near the small booth. The driver leans out the window and they have a short conversation. It is seen the guard points somewhere, showing the direction and the taxi pulls ahead. Soon after, the taxi passes Tsog walking in the opposite direction with his empty canisters along the pavement. Tsog comes to the guard and start chatting with him. From a distance, the short guard with oversized uniform look like a teenager as Tsog.

The taxi arrives in front of the same building where the new residents just moved in. A woman with pony tale (ANU) gets out of the taxi and looks around slowly. She makes few steps toward the entrance door and then stops, looking up. Suddenly, she turns around and walks to the playground. At the same moment, the man (Tuvshin) appears at the entrance in hurry but stops looking at her as she takes a seat on the bench by the playground. Finally he walks to the bench and sits next to the woman.

CUT TO:

11 INT. IN TRAIN - AFTERNOON (DAY1)

A passenger train slowly moves out of the city. The afternoon train is noisy and crowded. All the seats in the railway carriage are occupied but some passengers still walk through the corridor looking for a place to rest.

Tsog sits on his empty canisters in one of the train cars, staring straight forward thoughtfully.

Outside the train, near the main road to the countryside, he sees a white sedan parked with its trunk and one of its back doors open. The car is fully loaded with different kinds of kites and a MAN with glasses stands leaning against the car. A kite attached to the open door flies over the car. The man is reading a newspaper, totally ignoring the passing cars and the circling kites above him.

Next moment, Tsog sees two boys flying a kite in the middle of the landscape.

CUT TO:

12 EXT. VILLAGE TRAIN STATION - LATE AFTERNOON (DAY1)

The train station consists of a small building with a long wooden bench in front of it. The bench is newly painted and everything in the station looks clean and new. The station almost looks like a Lego toy - it is too nice - almost surreal - compared to the rest of the village.

A young guy about 18-19, with a stylish looking suit sits in the middle of the bench carelessly, chewing a matchstick and moving it back and forth in his mouth. He is JAGAA; an "up-and-coming" criminal and the big authority for the village teenagers. Jagaa is short and skinny, has narrow but sharp eyes, and gels his short hair like guys from Mafia movies. He has a strange habit of chewing a matchstick all the time. Arrogant, he likes to flex his power at every opportunity. Typical big fish in a small pond. Keeping their distance from him, an old couple sits calmly on the edge of the bench holding their bags.

A woman in a uniform passes and notices a cigarette butt in front of the bench. She takes it away silently. When the train arrives at the station, nothing has happened; all three people on the bench remain motionless.

The train stops and the carriage doors open but nobody moves in or out. Suddenly, two white canisters appear at the door of the last railway car. A moment later, the figure of the boy carrying the two canisters becomes clear. Tsog jumps onto the platform and walks away holding his empty canisters.

Jagaa gets up finally, takes a few lazy steps and whistles sharply. Tsog turns around and steps to meet Jagaa after a short pause. They meet by the end of the platform but Jagaa keeps a long silence until the train departs and the station sinks into the stillness.

JAGAA

Hey Birdie, are you trying to avoid me? I see you're a real businessman now. You should stick close to me. There are a lot of bad guys out there who want to take your money...

Jagaa taps Tsog's chest targeting his pocket. Without waiting for an answer Jagaa continues talking in the same careless manner.

JAGAA

I have a lot of friends. Not just here - in the city too. You know, you can't survive in the city without good friends.

Jagaa looks around as if looking for an audience for his show of power. Following Jagaa's eyes, Tsog looks around as well.

JAGAA

Birdie, I need just 5000 to get the city... I spent too much on girls yesterday...

Tsog smiles understandingly and speaks out finally.

TSOG

All I have is Dolgor's milk money. You know she'll flip out if I come up short...

JAGAA

Come on, man! I know you can deal with her. I'm not asking for all your money. Don't be so stingy! Besides, I spent the last of my cash on your father - Man, he was suffering from a lethal hangover.

TSOG

(interrupts Jagaa) Where is he now?

JAGAA

(smirks)

He was going to fix Bataa's bike. Hurry up, if you want to catch him before he gets another round! But give me 5000.

Tsog puts his canisters on the platform, takes out two bank notes from his pocket. He glances briefly at the money before he gives a banknote to Jagaa and shoves the rest back into his pocket quickly.

CUT TO:

13 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - LATE AFTERNOON (DAY1)

All the streets in this country village look similar to each other - just long rows of wooden fences. An old Russian motorcycle with side-car sits in front of one of these fences. Next to it are two white canisters. Tsog stands next to his father BAATAR, who is sitting on the ground leaning back against the fence. He yanks on his father's shirt, obviously asking him to get up. The father - already drunk, just ignores him. The door opens and a man around 50 appears holding an open bottle of vodka. BATAA, the owner of the motorcycle, gives Tsog a fake smile and exclaims.

BATAA

Wow, I see Birdie is here! Your father has got a golden touch. Look, my old bike is like new. We're just about to give a toast in its honor...

BAATAR

(grumbles) Birdie... Birdie... I don't like this name. Never liked Tsog either.

(MORE)

BAATAR (cont'd)

I always wanted his name to be Bunya! But his mother wanted the name Tsog.

Bataa takes a seat on the ground and picks up one of the glasses from the grass. He pours vodka into the glass and hands it to Tsog's father.

BATAA

Why Bunya?

BAATAR

You don't know Bunya? Ha, you guys are clueless! He...OK, let's drink then I will tell the story...

TSOG

(exclaims) Father!

Baatar ignores his warning and empties his glass.

BAATAR

(proudly)

A long time ago, a young monk named Bunya made a parachute that gave him the ability to fly. But Bunya was beaten and killed by the other monks - all for his wish to fly. It's a true story...

The father stretches out his hand with the glass toward Bataa asking for next potion.

BAATAR

Believe it or not, a cup was later made from poor Bunya's skull. Only the "big" monks used to drink from the cup - so that they too - could have as bright a brain as Bunya.

Tsog's father takes a long look at the glass of vodka as if it were the cup made from Bunya's skull, then swigs the whole glass.

TSOG

Father! It's enough! Let's go to home!

Tsog loses his patience and pulls his father's hand more forcefully.

BAATAR
(getting angry)
Don't tell your father what to do! Go away! Go
find your brother! Go tell him what to do!

Tsog releases his father's hand and walks away picking up the canisters.

BAATAR
Look at him! No respect for his own father. They
think I am a stupid alcoholic. Forget it! I can do
anything...
Everything... If his mother were alive...

Tsog speeds his walk and father's drunken grumbling fades out gradually.

[...]